

Most of today's poor people
are the working poor who
need the right help to improve
the lives of their families.

Hope and opportunity

America prides itself on being a country where anyone willing to work hard can get ahead. Our national identity is built on the belief that each of us - regardless of our race, gender, or religion - ought to have an equal opportunity to achieve success.

Most Americans also believe that no matter how bad someone's past mistakes, he or she can turn over a new leaf, try harder, and do better - and ought to have the chance to do this.

The New Face of Poverty • That's why the old welfare program - Aid to Families with Dependent Children - rubbed so many Americans the wrong way. Its original intention - to support widowed or abandoned women while they stayed home and raised children - was obscured by the dead-end of poverty and dependency it created for so many families. In the end, the people who used welfare were victimized not only by disincentives to work, but also by the profoundly negative public image of all people in poverty that welfare created.

Welfare reform eradicated not just welfare as we knew it, but also some of our stereotypes of poor people.

**Restoring the
American promise
that if you work
hard, you can
get ahead**

Hope and opportunity

The vast majority of today's poor people are the working poor - often people who are stuck on a treadmill of low-wage, often part-time jobs with no opportunities for advancement. And so today the agenda of hope and opportunity is:

- job training and education,
- affordable, high-quality child care,
- affordable, universally available health insurance,
- equal opportunity regardless of race or gender, and
- economic development and job creation in rural Washington.

These five essential elements make hope, opportunity and upward mobility possible. Now that welfare reform is an accomplished fact, it is time to move ahead on this agenda for all low-wage working people.

Owning a home
is part of the
American dream –
and that dream
has finally come
true for Gil and
Renee.



Photo courtesy Developmental Disabilities Services, Everett office

On first blush it would seem that a person with developmental disabilities would never be given, nor could handle, the responsibility of home ownership. For one couple, it is reality. Renee and Gil Roos of Everett have owned their own home for the past six years. For Renee, who spent many years living in Rainier School with about 600 other people, home ownership means, "I can do anything I want and go anywhere I want, without asking." For Gil it means, "I don't have to pay high rent all the time!"

Read the complete story posted on the Internet at: Facing the Future Profiles, located at <http://www.wa.gov/dshs/FacingtheFuture/NewsProfiles>

Hope and opportunity

Access to Success • Hope and opportunity are also the birthright of people with disabilities. A disability should not be a lifetime sentence to poverty and confinement. That's why the civil rights movement among people with disabilities has advocated vocational rehabilitation, self-directed care, and freedom to choose how and where to live. To succeed, this agenda requires more than government programs. It requires private employers willing to extend economic opportunity to people with a wide range of disabilities, and neighborhoods willing to welcome and include them.

The Golden Years: Freedom from Worry and Want • Older people are entitled to hope for years that are free from worry and want, and opportunity to live as independently as possible, to be contributing members of their communities, and to be able to afford the health care, prescriptions, and services they need.

Hope for Children • Children also need hope - hope for reconciliation with their parents when they are in conflict or in foster care; hope for a permanent, loving family when family reunification isn't possible; hope for friends, acceptance, and success in school. It may be that the death of hope is what triggers a young person's downward spiral into academic failure, alienation, drugs and crime. Nurturing hope - and fulfilling it - may therefore be the most important thing we do for children in the human services system.

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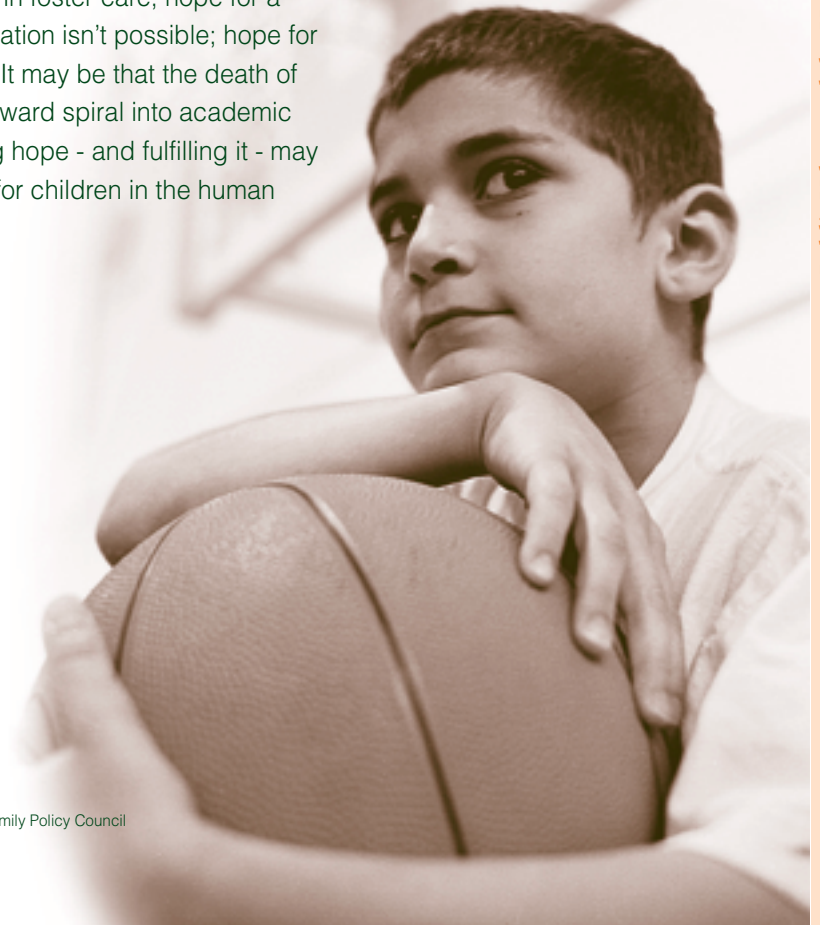


Photo courtesy Family Policy Council